

CHITOR AND OTHER POEMS

By the same Author :
Seekings and Other Poems.

Divine Indifference
and Other Stories.

CHITOR AND OTHER POEMS

BY

SHYAM SUNDAR LAL CHORDIA

FOREWORD

BY

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DEDICATED
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TO

SHRIMAN MAHARAJ KUMAR SIR BHOPAL
SHINGHJI SAHAB BAHADUR, K.C.I.E.

OF

UDAIPUR STATE, RAJPUTANA

PREFACE

Mr. S. S. Chordia is one of the promising Indian writers of English verse—that most hazardous of experiments—who seem likely to give the world what it would like to hear. Some two years ago he was kind enough to send me two of his publications, a cluster of sonnets and a small company of stories in which I was very glad to find matter for delight—the presence of such lines as

A gentle potter took my dust away.

His quest of truth was water on a leaf

Of stately lotus,—

where the spirit of the East is immanent in our modern English words that are got of such ancient lineage.

I am afraid that the encouragement mingled with my blunt criticism has to be held partly responsible for this new outburst of Mr. Chordia. He has chosen to enshrine his patriotism and hero-worship in various forms of the sonnet, and his subject-matter is partly that with which the outer world is familiar in the pages of TOD's "Rajasthan," partly more recent and personal topics. The result is a sequence of poems in which we have reflections of the splendour and bravery of the great times of the past, echoes of chivalry and tragedy, with revelations of the poet's heart

Of their own ardent fulness reverent.

In these sonnets I find an increase of poetic power : the lines are less often the result of struggle for rhyme, there is much beauty of phrase,¹ less inversion, and a more general accommodation to the order of words and rhythm of daily speech. And what is perhaps most important is that they are all Indian : there is not one that does not contain some peculiar touch which stamps it as of the sunlands.

The cultivation of the sonnet is a tempting pursuit: it is so easy to write, and yet so difficult to do well. In its perfection there is a harmony, proportion and outline in the fourteen lines, which cause the poem to resemble an early Chinese vase. But such examples are rare : there are perhaps, not a hundred in the English language.

It is not pretended that Mr. Chordia has added to their number. But I think it will be agreed that in this little volume are some of the best sonnets written in English by Indian writers,—poems to be grateful for and to make us wish for further revelations of Mr. Chordia's poetic personality.

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CHITOR

Here is the old Chitor¹ queen-like and crown'd
With deathless glory; in the long sad past
For thee the legion Rajput chiefs fell fast
Amid the shock of battle; and falling found
The lotus-heaven of the Lord. What streams
Of precious blood they shed? What wars they
waged?

When marched and counter-marched the foes!
and blazed

Their swords in the dark hour of doom when
dreams

Of pulsing life shone dim in them. They
fought

For thee, they died for thee whene'er thy walls,
Guarding thy palaces, temples, towers and halls,
Were by the mighty hordes of Moslems sought.
O Nurse and Mother of the brave and free!
How red with blood the path that leads to thee?

⋮

THE DYING PRATAP

The dying hero lay disconsolate,
His spirit lingered in the worn-out frame;
But Freedom's warrior feared not death: the fate
Of Mewar rent his troubled soul. Then came
The sad thought of Chitor still unredeemed;
The gallant hearts that pined for it and died;
His own life's purpose blurred and thwarted
seemed
While Mughals held his fathers' fort in pride.
Within the secret chambers of his mind
The memories of Haldighat sped by—
The Jhala's sacrifice and Sakta's cry
"Ho! Rider of the blue horse!" from behind
And Chetak's love. Night came and endless
sleep,
His trial o'er: he fell in slumber deep.

PRATAP (1572-97) was the ruler of Mewar. He never submitted to Akbar and made tremendous sacrifices for the independence of his Country.

HALDIGHAT has been described by Colonel Tod as the "Thermopylae of Mewar."

MANA, THE JHALA CHIEF, seized the insignia of Mewar and rearing the gold sun over his own head fell in the battle of Haldighat with all his vassals and saved the life of Pratap.

SAKTA, Pratap's own brother. His personal enmity to Pratap had made him a traitor to Mewar, but at Haldighat he killed two Moghul chiefs pursuing Pratap flying on the gallant *Chetak* and greeted him from behind, "Ho! Rider of the blue horse."



BHAMASHA

This long while Bhama's fame has perished not!
Pratap with all his comrades of the field
Stood mute in blank despair: his vision reeled
When stretched the desert boundless, as his lot
For miles. His sword that flashed in Freedom's
cause

Now rested in the sheath. He kissed the dust
Of Mewar tear-bedimmed. Now snapped his
trust

In God. Should Moghuls give his country laws?
But for the love of him the Shaji old

His glittering hoards of silver, jewels, gold,
He offered humbly at his master's feet.

O Merchant Prince! your simple deed of love
Was such as angels blazon all above.

Dim down the aisle of Time your soul I greet!

BHAMASHA was the Prime Minister of Pratap. When Pratap, unable to withstand the tide of opposition, wanted to leave Mewar, Bhamasha gave him the accumulated treasure of his ancestors which was enough to keep twenty-five thousand soldiers for twenty years.

DURGADAS

When Jaswant died¹ among the Afghan hills
His knight, a man of virtue, wisdom, force,
Who shook the Peacock throne before his course,
His love profound to Maru vowed. What rills
Of blood his sheeny sword of doom had spilt
To free his Mother, bleeding, trodden, cowed
In shame of bondage by the Mughals proud.
He crushed them, as they crushed her, for their
guilt.

His Prince remembered not the saviour's hand
That had crowned him, the gallant guide and
friend,
Who nursed and reared his troubled youth
in pride.

That soul of honour brooked not Ajit's scorn;
His epic deeds the songs of bards adorn.
Exiled from home, a broken heart, he died.

Jaswant Singh, the ruler of Jodhpur, Rajputana, was the Governor of Kabul in the time of Aurangzeb.

Durgadas organised the Rajput revolt against Aurangzeb as he wanted to convert the infant Ajit Singh, Jaswant's successor. *Durgadas* in his old age was exiled by Ajit Singh.

Maru is Marwar, whose capital is Jodhpur.

KRISHNA KUMARI—THE FLOWER OF RAJASTHAN

Two rival chiefs unfurl'd 'mid raging shouts
Their lofty banners, for sweet Krishna's hand;
That day of saddest woe unmanly doubts
Assailed the hapless Rana of the land
Of heroes fallen low. Her death alone
Could save a woeful waste of life and end
The baneful clash of arms that shook his throne.
His life was in her own, but ah! a friend
Of his was urging peace at shameful price:
To find her tragic fate they flung the dice.
She sat doomed in the dark past mortal aid,
And smiling drank the Kusumb draught, when
brought,
Of cooling herbs with fatal poisons fraught;
She died a death of flowers undismayed.

Krishna Kumari was the daughter of Rana Bheem of Udaipur. She had to be poisoned as Jaipur and Jodhpur both claimed her as bride.

Ajit of the Chondavat clan, 'the traitor to manhood, his sovereign and humanity,' was the evil genius of the Rana.

MIRA—THE RAJPUT QUEEN OF CHITOR

The Rana did not hear your music sad
As underneath the reddening mango-grove
You chanted forth your simple songs of love
And beauty 'midst the sadhus rapture-mad.
The whispers reached him from the market-place
Telling the wayward paths you trod. He
thought
You had some sweeter love than his and wrought
Upon his kingly line untold disgrace.
O golden-hearted Sappho of the East!
You broke a fragment of your lyric soul
With godhead crowned for mortal man to feast;
The Rana then divined your secret goal.
In shame and sorrow now began his quest
While you at Brindaban were Girdhar's guest.

MIRA was a great devotee of Krishna. Her songs are still sung all over Rajputana. She left her home and went away to Brindaban as her husband was an obstacle in her path of spiritual progress.

GIRDHAR is one of the names of Krishna

ZEBUNNISSA

When lion-hearted Shiva pledged to truth
Was mocked by Aurangzeb to wound his pride,
A princess in the spring-time of her youth
Behind the arras sobbed in shame, and cried.
He, brighter than her fancy's blazing dream,
Stirring her radiant soul with visions fleet,
Amid the stars of night shone like a beam
Of morn; and filled her heart and eyes. Love
sweet
Pierced her thenceforth; but roses red and white
She gave him not, nor thoughts parched by
desire,
Nor aught that lacked in love's celestial fire,
But silent worship of the soul. Aright
She loved and suffered pain in loneliness
Keeping love's secret from his consciousness.

ZEBUNNISSA—was the daughter of Aurangzeb. She was a mystic and a poetess of great eminence. She was in love with Shivaji, the founder of the Mahratta Empire.

SURDAS—THE BLIND HINDI POET

O sun among the bards of Brija green!
You looked upon the face of love in youth
And wandered in the trackless path of truth
Till darkness fell upon your vision keen.
Your light was quenched like Milton's, but full
 well
You felt the wizard charms of earth and sky,
Of birds and trees and flowers that bloom and
 die,
Rehearsing them in music's wondrous spell.
From sunrise, moonrise, and the streaming stars
You built a perfect nesting for the blind
And trustful souls on earth to rest and find
Eternal peace untouched by raging wars.
You sang of Nature and her God sublime
In verse of gold outsoaring space and time.

BRIJA—the country around Agra and Muttra—the country of passionate love.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

O dreaming Laureate of the dreaming East!
You stand head-high among the poets and sing
In sweetest voice that ever breathed in spring
Of love and life and death. O Nature's priest!
Death holds no fears for you when life is told
As the altar-place beyond the sunset-land
Is richer with the offerings from your hand,—
God ever thirsteth for your music's gold,
Your tree of fame has touched the skiey height,
The stars that shine—they are its blossoms
 bright,
The moon, the folded glory time unfolds,
In spell of soothing light the wide earth holds.
These buds, when they shall burst in golden
 light,
Will drive from hence the blackest monster
 Night.

MOON RISE ON THE PICHOLA AT UDAIPUR

The chimes of midnight from the palace-tower
Float dreamful o'er the waters half-asleep;
And fluting calls and murmurs strangely creep
Through drowsy lotus-leaves this silent hour.
Black loom the palms that wave their plumes,
and sigh
When spin the chakrabaks, a love-lorn pair
At night, their ceaseless passion, here and there;
Deep in the dark they move, they dive and cry.
The fancy-haunted Ghat, the temple gleams
Glassed in the tranquil lake, and now meseems
From out the sky a passion-flower blows,
And blazes round its heart a nimbus bright
Of beams, that bathes the mountain-tops in light:
A stir, a quiver, then the moon arose.

THE SAHELIAKI BARI—"THE GARDEN OF NYMPHS" AT UDAIPUR

The wanton west wind stirs the mango flower
As with a lover's rapture in the dim
Peace of this Queen of Gardens-stirs the slim
Reflections of the dreaming palms, that tower
Above the marble pool of skiey blue,
Where in spring time the scarlet lilies blow.
Its fountains famed afar still murmur low
The secret furtively divined by few.
Blithe troubadours, the songsters are its guests,
Who love its cool repose and flowers gay,
Making melodious their leafy nests
They chase with laughing notes all care away.
O treasure-house of sweet felicity !
The wide world's loveliness I dream in thee.

BADI-KA-TALAB AT UDAIPUR

Bent in life's prime with grief and sick in mind
I wander in the woodland from the race
Of man, to seek a resting place, to find
Your lotus-azure waters full of grace,
Deep in the bosom of the dark-green hills.
The flight of cranes with heavy flapping wings
Acclaims the amber-coloured dawn, which thrills
Your dreamy beauty with a kiss, and brings
The healing myrrh to me with fever hot:
How am I fallen from the state of man!
Through sorrow, stress and strain the fall began;
Receive me now to share your quiet lot,
O Hills and Waters breathing peace divine!
Your beauty is my drooping spirit's wine.

THE JAISAMAND—THIRTY-TWO MILES FROM UDAIPUR

The leafy hills and boulders black with days
Seem endless as we climb to reach the pile
Above the Jaisamand, to rest awhile
From rowing on the rock-girt lake where plays
The sun-set with the waves. From out the skies
The darkling shadows limn the silent hills;
The wild duck's faint and flighty whirring fills
The air; the night flowers ope their starry eyes
And glance above to drink the nectar'd moon;
But lo! the spray-wet wizard winds arise
And smite the waters spread for miles, and soon
The perfect dream of tranquil beauty flies.
Dear home of sweetest bliss! We stand apart
But you live still enshrined within my heart.

THE PASSING OF SHAH JEHAN

The shrunken Shah Jehan, once mighty King
Of golden Hind, now shorn of splendour lay,
Deep-smitten in the soul by sorrow's sting
His dream of endless bliss had died away.
Death snatched from him without a word his wife
Adored Mumtaz, his dream, his soul's desire;
And Aurangzeb possessed by subtle strife
His Peacock Throne, and jewels flashing fire.
He donned his bridal robes of purple gold
And filled his jasper cup with fragrant wine
At fall of eve, though captive, wan and cold.
With misty eyes he watched the Taj, her shrine;
Then deep inhaled the Jumna's cooling breath
And rode, to meet his Love, the steed of death.

"The Emperor Shah Jehan, poet and warrior, but known to the modern world mainly as the bulder of the Taj, the man who petrified love into form and left to the world's lovers a message of eternal beauty."
"The Illustrated Times of India."

THE GAU-MUKH AT CHITOR

Tread softly, pilgrim, on the edge of this
Still-sky-reflecting shady pool; beside
Its foaming waters cool, with splendid pride,
The chosen priest lit the quick flame of bliss
When rushed the Rajput Queens on palfreys
white

To death. The Yavan forces had hemmed in
The hallowed Prince-land long; the hope to win
Was dead; to save their souls from Mongol
blight

They prayed to Him who listens from on high.
The sandal pyre with ritual sanctified
Blazed forth for maids trained from their birth
to die

Without a tinge of fear. Souls deified!
The best of all the brides! I bow to you,
Purer than fire, chaster than snow and true.

1

2

3

4

5

6

THE JAIN SHRINES AT MOUNT ABU

The blue-topped Guru Shikhara lonesome lies
In morning silent, passionless, serene,
Wrapped up in folds of smoky mists that rise
Slow from the forest dark. In amber sheen
I thread my way through lanes hedged in with
rose

And peach trees wild in pinky bloom. High soar
The birds and higher yet in joy, when glows
The sun along the hill-side, to adore
His light. The sacred shrines of Delwada
With creamy-tinted domes of faery charm
And lightness, built by Tej and Vimlasa
When faith was stronger, swim into my view
At Abuji, where rest in dreamless calm
The high-souled ones whose love this worship
drew.

THE JAIN SHRINES AT MOUNT ABU

O dreams of beauty dreamt in spotless white!
O delicate designs of filigree
So exquisite—produced by scraping light
The mass of marble rough—wherein we see
Our India's jewelled past. Of artless art
Are made these halls of superb tracery,
Wrought pillars, doorways, niches carved. My
heart

In worship goes to those who built in glee
Their best. Across the silence of the years
I read their inmost thoughts, cut smooth in stone,
Rich thoughts that charmed for aught I know
—the wild

And wandering raiders, who razed not the aisled
Shrine of the wise Tirthankaras, which wears
A mellow touch bestowed by time alone.

TIRTHANKARAS—Incarnations of God in Jainism.



DELHI

The twilight stirs among the wilted leaves
Of autumn's myriad whispers as I sit
Beside the phantom-haunted graves unlit,
A crooning wind weird spells around me weaves.
Dreams of the proud and mighty ghost-like flit
Chilled in the icy breath of death, and trust
To me the secrets of the heroes in the dust—
Long dead and now beyond recall. The writ
Of Fate I read amidst the ruins grand
Wide scattered all around the Kutub land.
The Dynasties and Kings have passed away,
With pomp and pageant dazed, into the tomb.
Despoiled by death, touched by the hand of
doom,
Their starry names flashed briefer than a day.

MAYO COLLEGE, AJMER

(To H. H. Shri Lakshman Singhji of Dungarpur,
the most illustrious Mayo-Collegian of his time.)

Your beauty thrilled me from afar, when long
Ago, in gleaming moon-lit garb arrayed
Your grandeur to my vision you displayed,
O Queen of Learning famed in bardic song!
The fragrance of your soul you shed for me
Like petals of a flower that Phalgun night.
Dear Foster-Mother of the Kings! Your bright
Blue hills like music rose in ecstasy.
No dust of Time dare touch your radiant brow
With fadeless blossoms crown'd. Traducers
base
Speak ill of you ! They have not seen your face
That charmed my body, mind and soul, I vow.
O cherished idol of the Rajput race!
My words can ne'er reveal your queenly grace.

MUIR CENTRAL COLLEGE ALLAHABAD

Amid the general wreck of all my dreams
And builded hopes whence come I hither, worn
And pale, to my own mother-heart? forlorn
I've wandered long by wooded hills and streams,
A shadow of the trackless waste, in quest
Of Beauty's soul with eye-lids wet. Thy Tower
Still stands unchanging with the changing hour
And hears the music of the Ganges blest.
The sky-aspiring domes, the peepal grove,
The tamarind walk, the close-cropp'd lawns,
 where play
The scholars well-befriended, keen and gay,
The shady well, the dreamy look, what love
In myriad hearts thy beauty calls? Adieu,
My Mother! God thy wisdom's store renew.

S A C R I F I C E

A monstrous priest and pilgrims throng a shrine
Towering aloft on mighty rocks which brood
Deep-shadow'd from the giants of the wood
In sombre solitude. Full steeped in wine
They lead a mountain-goat for sacrifice
When peace sleeps o'er the silent vale at night.
A coloured candle's faint and flickering light
Illumes the ancient place of worship. Thrice
They chant the votive 'mantras' rapt in faith
That knows no doubt. Their love of God
is shame
To me when I behold that creature, tame
And meek, invoking mute in pain his wraith.
Could crimsoned altars be his dwelling place?
O soulless pilgrims of a savage race!

THE DEITY OF THE RUINED TEMPLE

There stands a massive temple on a hill;
The road to it is rough; the wild storms beat
Against its walls of amethyst; the trill
Of song-birds from its dream-dark dome doth
greet

The lonely pilgrim! and the conches, bells
And drums lie huddled in a corner; dank
And putrid smell the bats. A shepherd tells
How that the surging hordes of Tartars, rank
On rank, hacked, slew. Then prayed the aged
priest

For mystic help; but smiled the image, raised
To glory, from beyond the incense clouds.
Thenceforth trod not with zest the eager crowds
For worship. But the Faithful Allah praised,
And kept with shout and song the Ramzan feast.

DAWN AND LOVE'S MEMORY

The vagrant stars, that gleamed and moved at
night

In merry ramble, rest now 'mid a pool
Of blue: the magic tints of morning bright
Adorn the light-gray sky in beauty; cool
And honeyed is the breath of wakened flowers.
Love's mirrored chamber sleeps in dawn; close
furl'd

The coloured carpet lies; in morning hours
The moon-loved wreath is snapt in twain. The
world

Of love has vanished from the hall: and mute
Hangs my love's harp which sang of glorious
youth

And love undying in faith absolute.
A candle burns faint like the torch of truth;
What makes it blink and weep thick draped in
gloom?

The fate of moths? Its own impending doom.

SHE DRIVES HER CATTLE HOME

The gauzy dusk is falling with a sigh
On dreaming deodar tops; the evening star
Hangs like an opal in the sombre sky;
Soft through the dark majestic pines afar
The glow-worms flit in golden waves; the breath
Of air is scent. A cow-herd maid—her hair
Long, silken, loose, her eyes as dark as death,
Is driving with a switch of lotus fair
Her cattle home; a crown of scarlet flowers
And crumpled leaves bedecks her brow. She
sings

Of th' ancient sorrow of the purple hills;
The moaning of the homeless wind for hours;
The sea's eternal anguish sore. She fills
My soul with gloom where deep her music rings.

THE QUEEN OF MY HEART

She loved me once but will not love again;
Her elfin beauty haunts my sleeping dreams
And waking hours: beneath the pale moon's
beams

She plays me false—her erstwhile god. Ah!
vain

My yearning, passion, pain and tears unshed
Against her word. The Queen of my poor
Heart

Is fairer than the realm of fairy art
Can fashion; but she strikes her lover dead.
I watch the cold, unkind and depthless skies,
A blaze of glory infinite—and sigh
For love torn through the stress of soul: my cries
Move not the mighty stars that silent lie
The littleness of life and love I feel—
Those splendid heavens cut me like cold steel.

A FLAME OF GOD

The moon in silence woos the lotus white,
The lotus woos the moon in rapture wild;
In slender grace the petals move at night,
She blossoms forth: my sweet-heart is their child.
Her face is soft as twilight dusk, her hair
Is darker than night falling on the hills,
The radiance of her skin moon-white and fair
With utter shame the brightest jewel fills.
My life is spent; amid the dark I grope
All battered in the struggle with a Fate
That hurled its thunder-bolts in deadly hate.
But like a flame of God her beauty shines
Through rain and storm and darkness; and with
 hope
Of heav'n it warms my soul that droops and
 pines.

The idea of the first half of the sonnet is borrowed from a Burmese song.

HER MUSIC

She sits upon a way-side stone. In sweet
Serenity she sings. From out the deep
Her music comes beside the lake, asleep
Beneath the mid-day sun. The fawn's faint
bleat
Is hushed when steal the spirits of the trees,
Souls of the flowers chanting low their rhyme,
And heaven's birds to hear her sing. "That
Time
Ne'er was—that Time is not"—thus hum the
bees
Tranced by her rapture wafted on the breeze.
And all my songs I write for her to sing
As in my soulless words she breathes the flame
Of spring, and strength to soar upon her wing.
Dull seems the dream of glory, riches, fame,
Beside her strains of sadly-soothing ease.

“ I A M T H O U ”

With swollen eyes I sought her far and near
From dawn to dusk. How steady burnt within
My heart her beauty's flame, and love by sin
Unblighted? Overwhelmed with hope and fear
I reached her leafy hut among the trees
Past midnight, gently knock'd upon the door
And breathed, "Tis I". She whispered, "No,"
though sore

At heart. I sobbed and sobbed the dreamy
breeze

Along with me. A life of gloom and pain
I lived for months; I knew she must be mine,
For she and I at heart were one. And now
Once more my pilgrim self touched at her shrine,
My moon flung off her veil of pride, when fain
She heard me say in rapture, "I am thou."

THE QUEEN OF BEAUTY

The Queen of Beauty was the Queen of Death;
Year after year the bravest and the best
Among the youth, victorious in test
Of arms, did lift her veil and feel her breath.
The aged priests unchallenged claimed the right
To burn the winner of the kingly crown,
The victor of the tourney in the town,
Soon after love's all glorious but brief night.
The portals of her palace opened wide,
He walked in with the High Priest as his guide:
Pondering he paused; and then in silence
prayed:
She beckoned from her throne to rend her veil
And kiss her mouth; and he obeyed. "All hail
Thou carrion death!" and thus love's debt was
paid.

OPINIONS AND PRESS REVIEWS.

Sir Edmund Gosse.—"I have read your Sonnets with much admiration. Their flowing language and rich Indian imagery are expressed with an accuracy and a felicity extremely remarkable in one not born to use the English language."

E. E. Speight, Esqr., Prof. of English Literature, Osmania University, Hyderabad.—"It is delightful to see that while you are following the main lines of English versification you fill your poems with Indian colour and feeling. . . . No one could write more beautiful lines than

"His quest of truth was water on a leaf
"Of stately lotus.

Certainly nothing more fitting in expression or beautiful as a simile has been written these twenty-five years."

The Calcutta Review.—"A Volume of Sonnets some of which attain high poetic distinction. The author possesses a power of vivid word-painting truly admirable, and simple bits of descriptive touches are sometimes highly suggestive."

The Foreword.—"Each of the Sonnets enshrines some vivid little glimpse of Indian life or landscape."

The Modern Review.—"The author also has the art of describing beautiful sights in befitting language and the Kalki Avatar, the Joymandir at Udaipur, 'The Taj', and the Fateh Sagar at Udaipur all display considerable talent and genuine poetic feeling and one will look forward to further works by this author who has poetic ideas to express and has studied the technique of his art."

The Indian Review.—"Another aspirant to fame in Indo-English Literature is Mr. S. S. Chordia, M.A., who has brought out two attractive little volumes, one of Sonnets and another of Short Stories. . . . he shows considerable mastery over the Sonnet form and is as at home in the Poetry of Nature as he is in that of Love."

The Leader, Allahabad.—"Mr. Chordia has the gift of vivid description always touched with a sense of lyric beauty."

United India and Indian States.—"Mr. Chordia writes fine, majestic English. Even those who are not aware that he is a poet as well, will easily feel that he is if they read the sketches. The book shows descriptive power of a very high order, and is essentially Indian in its atmosphere."